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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON PRESIDENT BUSH'S SPEECH

Summary

-- President Bush's speech presenting the U.S. administration views on the Middle East is the lead story in all papers published today, June 25. Major headlines focus on the President's call for a change of the Palestinian leadership and highlight his vision of a Palestinian state within three years. Text of speech is carried in the inside pages in all papers. Only one editorial so far comments on the speech. More are expected tomorrow.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Disappointing speech"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (06/25) editorializes: "In his long-awaited speech, President Bush gave Sharon all the time he needs to exercise his destructive policies in the region; took away from the Palestinians their hope of being free and independent; and deprived the Arabs of the feeling that the United States can really be an honest broker in the Middle East. The President's speech did not carry a peace plan as much as it carried blatantly impossible conditions, that would not solve the Palestinian issue, but would emphasize the concept of Israeli force that treads on Palestinian people, divides up their lands and their villages, and deprives them of the simplest of their rights. Bush should have begun his speech by urging both the Palestinians and the Israelis to resume negotiations, by ordering Sharon to pull out his troops from Palestinian territories, by calling for restarting the peace process from where it stopped, because what is on the ground is occupation and resistance to occupation. Bush's speech was disappointing. It completely ignored Arab initiatives and places Israel's interests and Sharon's ideas high on the list of priorities. We believe that this vision of Bush will not lead to peace, rather to more tension in the region."

GNEHM